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## THE USE OF PICTURES IN TEACHING LITERATURE

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The most intangible, and consequently the most difficult, phase of English for definite and permanent results is literature. It is doubtless in the teaching of this art that the teacher most often and most keenly feels the need of help. Probably the most neglected of easily accessible resources in vitalizing the teaching of this subject is the use of pictures. No other art, with a few specific exceptions in favor of music, makes such a complement to the art of literature. Painting and literature are companion arts, each complete within itself, yet each supplying beauties not possessed by the other.

For clearness and brevity I shall discuss the subject under three heads: (1) specific values in the use of pictures, (2) classroom use of pictures, and (3) sources of picture supply.

### I. SPECIFIC VALUES IN THE USE OF PICTURES

1. *Pictures aid in making literature appeal to pupils as a reality.*—Here, just where literature is weak in its appeal to the mass, pictures are strong. Most pupils of secondary grade think of literature as a dream—often a beautiful one—but a *dream*. Poe's *Annabel Lee* and Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* are often considered fanciful images of dreamers until they are anchored in the mind by the substantial form of pictures. The teacher must, above all things, overcome this attitude toward literature. Literature's thoroughgoing truthfulness and reality must be accepted without reserve on the part of the pupil if its spirit is to enter into and inspire his life. The scene of the departure of the Acadians from Grand Pré may mean little to the unimaginative pupil who reads *Evangeline*; but when he looks at the picture, his whole interest is concentrated upon the tragic situation; and the buildings on fire, the ships on the ocean, and Evangeline's beautiful form thrown

in agony across the lifeless body of her father arouse a feeling of reality which causes him to accept the poem as truth. Nothing vitalizes literature study more than this feeling of reality. Pictures are here the best of handmaids; they transform leaden words into glowing realities.

2. *Pictures give a sense-impression of the literary situation through the eye.*—So closely related is this with the preceding point, that it may be considered a subdivision of it. Psychological experiments have proved that impressions received through the eye are, for most persons, far stronger than those received through any other sense avenue. Especially with pupils the visual images are the most permanent. Oral or verbal impressions should be deepened and strengthened by the visual. The scene of little Ernest at his mother's feet, gazing thoughtfully upon the great stone face, may be vague and indistinct to the little reader, but let his eye, upon turning a page, fall upon the picture with its clear figures, its intermingling of lights and shadows, and the glow of the sunset, and then the situation will sink indelibly into his life, to be a constant pleasure and inspiration. For economy of teaching power the picture is invaluable, for it enlivens literature by giving the most permanent and most interesting sense impressions—those of the eye.

3. *Details of pictures supplement suggestive description of literature.*—Most pupils who find literature uninteresting find it so because they do not read with active imagination. Works of richest imagery often fall fruitlessly upon deaf ears or blinded eyes. Even when the spiritedness of the production arouses a response, the pupils are usually content with a skeleton image and do not give it life completeness. Vagueness characterizes their imagery. Here, again, the picture is of the greatest service. Bryant's "plashy brink" or Wordsworth's "host of golden daffodils" is vested with a content of beauty when seen in pictures. By careful use of pictures the teacher may enable the pupil to read literature with active imagination that renders the best descriptive passages a constant revelry of beautiful images. Such training will aid the pupil greatly in entering the spirit of literature.

4. *The aesthetic appeal of pictures enhances that of literature.*—"A thing of beauty is a joy forever," whether a poem or a picture;

and if one genuinely enjoys a painting of Hester Prynne or a portrait of Annie Laurie, the enjoyment of the literature in which those characters appear will be accelerated. The painter's interpretation has its message, and it often reveals beauties overlooked in literature. The companion art of painting should avail much in stimulating aesthetic appreciation of the beauties of descriptive literature.

The specific values of making literature appeal as a reality, of visual impressions, of detailed supplement, and of aesthetic enjoyment, render pictures an invaluable aid in vitalizing the teaching of literature.

## II. CLASSROOM USE OF PICTURES

How should pictures be used in the classroom in order to obtain these values? The sole aim or principle of the classroom use of pictures is to obtain a reaction on the part of the pupils that insures a vitalization of the production illustrated. In order to secure such reaction a few prerequisites must be observed.

1. *Interest must be stimulated in the production illustrated before the illustration is considered.*—A pupil whose interest has not been aroused in our Puritan forefathers will see little in Boughton's fascinating picture of "The Return of the Mayflower" to engage his attention. But a few introductory words will enable him to enter into its spirit and beauty. The eagerness with which pupils revel in the pictures of a favorite production, as *Evangeline* or *Enoch Arden*, is a source of gratification to the interested teacher. Acquaintance and knowledge must precede such appreciation. The teacher should be assured of the psychological moment before introducing the picture. This will guarantee a class reaction.

2. *Pupils must be given time to see the picture individually*, group around it associated ideas gleaned from the subject-matter, and reach a feeling of completeness that comes from satisfying curiosity and personal interest. Pictures must not merely be held up before the class, or passed hurriedly among them, or placed somewhere for students' future reference; but they must be seen individually by the pupils while interest is at its height. Only at this time and by this means can the greatest reaction be secured.

3. *While the pupils are thus considering the picture, the teacher should provoke discussion* in order to correct wrong ideas or reveal unobserved points and beauties. Skilful questions should stimulate pupils to discover in the picture differences from and likenesses to the original in the literature.

The time spent in these stages of securing a reaction will be highly compensated for by the permanency of the impression and by the heightened interest in the production.

### III. SOURCES OF PICTURE SUPPLY

Varied and easily accessible sources of pictures make it possible for every teacher to obtain an extensive collection for personal gratification and for the interest and enlightenment of his pupils.

1. *There are valuable illustrations in most of our texts*—too often neglected or ignored. Yet we all know from experience and observation that a child upon opening a new book will hurriedly turn its pages to find its pictures, and if none are found, the child in disappointment will lay the book aside as “dry” or uninteresting. Elementary readers are usually well illustrated, but the advanced ones rarely so. One of our otherwise excellent sets of adopted readers is lacking in this respect. It has not a single picture. Texts should be well illustrated, and teachers should be intent upon utilizing the whole teaching power of the illustrations.

2. *The most fruitful source for the teacher is found in the pictures of newspapers, magazines, book catalogues, and postcards.*—A large collection should be made from these. Only a few days ago I found in a newspaper a most interesting illustration of the popular, but fallacious, idea of the setting of “Coming through the Rye,” and the original, correct one of the song. The popular idea is that of two lovers meeting in a rye field, while the original setting is that of coming through the shallow Rye River. These pictures were far more powerful in replacing the original setting than many words could have been. Many such pictures can be secured by the alert teacher. Moreover, the teacher should possess scores of postcards illustrating literary scenes and places.

3. *But probably the most effective source—due to personal interest—is views of literary places taken by the teacher himself.*—His fresh-

ness of enthusiasm is then communicated to the pupils, and the picture becomes a living reality. All teachers of literature who have the opportunity should take their own views of literary places.

4. *Illustrated editions of literature studied in schools are numerous and should be possessed by the teacher.*—They are worth far more than the outlay.

5. *Regular sets of pictures are furnished by companies.*—In addition to prints these consist of stereopticon views and lantern slides. Both are very helpful. But the most effective of this class is the motion picture. One hour spent by the teacher and class in witnessing *Rip Van Winkle* will mean more than many hours of class study. Motion pictures are beginning to make their appearance in the schools and are powerful agencies in teaching literature, as well as other subjects.

6. *Another source of illustration that should not be neglected is that of the pupils themselves.*—Pupils are highly interested in their own drawings and paintings and are interested in those of their classmates. They may thus be trained to see the deficiencies and merits of illustrations. The teacher should take a personal interest in these and request copies for preservation and future reference.

A teacher who gathers an extensive collection from these sources will find his own interest in literature deepened and enriched. How much greater will be the pupils' increase of interest! Literature will then be a reality, and, being so, it will bring richness, pleasure, and inspiration to the lives of the pupils.